

Having described the invention, what is claimed is:

- 1 1. A thrust bearing assembly comprising:
 - 2 two thrust races;
 - 3 a plurality of rolling elements between and against the
 - 4 two thrust races, for supporting relative rotation of the
 - 5 thrust races about a common axis;
 - 6 a spring washer axially outward of the two thrust races
 - 7 for engaging a support surface and for applying a preload to a
 - 8 first of the two thrust races; and
 - 9 retention means for retaining the two thrust races, the
 - 10 rolling elements and the spring washer together as an assembly
 - 11 to facilitate handling and installation.
- 1 2. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein
 - 2 the retention means comprises an axially extending case
 - 3 positioned radially inward or radially outward of the two
 - 4 thrust races, the rolling elements and the spring washer, to
 - 5 restrain radial movement thereof; and wherein the case has
 - 6 radially extending portions engageable with the spring washer
 - 7 and a second of the two thrust races to restrain axially
 - 8 outward movement of the spring washer and the second thrust
 - 9 race.

1 3. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 2, wherein
2 the case comprises a drawn cup with a lip extending radially
3 and engageable with the spring washer to restrain axially
4 outward movement of the spring washer.

1 4. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 3, wherein
2 the case includes a second lip extending radially and
3 engageable with the second thrust race.

1 5. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 4, wherein
2 the case is formed of two drawn cups that overlap, forming a
3 cylindrical double-wall portion.

1 6. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 4, wherein
2 the case is formed of a single drawn cup.

1 7. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 4, wherein
2 the case comprises a drawn cup with an apertured bottom
3 portion extending radially and engageable with the spring
4 washer to restrain axially outward movement of the spring
5 washer.

1 8. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein
2 the spring washer comprises a Belleville spring having a

3 conical cup facing axially outward from the thrust races.

1 9. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein
2 the spring washer comprises a Belleville spring having a
3 conical cup facing axially inward toward the thrust races.

1 10. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein a
2 first of the thrust races has an outer diameter smaller than
3 the outer diameter of a second of the thrust races, to
4 facilitate flow of lubricant, and wherein the first thrust
5 race has an inner diameter smaller than the inner diameter of
6 the second thrust race, to facilitate flow of lubricant.

1 11. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein
2 the rolling elements are rollers retained within a bearing
3 cage.

1 12. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 11, wherein
2 the bearing cage is of a box-type configuration.

1 13. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 11, wherein
2 the bearing cage is of a sigma-type configuration.

1 14. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 2, wherein
2 at least some of the radially extending portions engageable
3 with the spring washer or thrust race are formed by staking.

1 15. A thrust bearing assembly according to claim 1, wherein
2 the two thrust races, the rolling elements and the spring
3 washer are configured to have zero axial clearance within the
4 retention means, prior to installation of the thrust bearing
5 assembly, such that damage from vibration during handling is
6 reduced.